

Open Letter to Church Board

Date: October 22, 2013

To: Church Board: Sara Simons, Chairman Katie Spencer, V. Chair
Don Whitley, Secretary Dorene Drake, Treasurer
Barb Scantlin, Elder Chair Pat Whitley, Deacons
Oaks Christian Church
1216 Bethlehem St
Houston, Texas 77018-1918

From: Charlie Dean, church member

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is in response to a letter, in the form of an email, from Sara Simons dated October 13, 2013. (See pages 4 through 6.) All of you mentioned above, and others, received a copy of the October 13 letter. I assume you discussed the content of Sara's letter, along with my letters to the Board dated September 24 and October 1, 2013, at the October 13 business meeting.

Your distinction of official and "not official" documents is disingenuous. Church documents that are/were on personal computer belong to OCC. Arguing that an electronic file is "not official" because it was not physically handed to a secretary, and being evasive about making it available, is childish.

You suggest that I "go to the source" and ask for a copy. That is not my responsibility. It is the responsibility of the Board. In any event I do not know who the source is, and it might speed things up if you would tell me who the source is.

I request that the Board contact the source and see that approximately two decades of missing material is put on the OCC computer in the church office. By at least 1993 churches were using computers. If the electronic documents have been lost or destroyed, please admit it. **The longer you hide this, and the longer you drage this out, the more embarrassing it will be for all of us.**

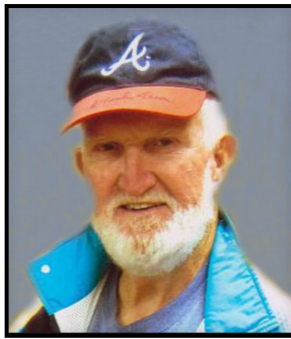
In your letter of October 15, 2013 you say you "want a definitive plan drawn up and agreed upon by the board before any digitalizing effort is put in to the project." You have a laundry list of hoops and hurdles for someone to navigate. You have no authority to prohibit or prevent any OCC member from purchasing equipment, bringing it to OCC, digitizing documents, organizing them, engaging in digital preservation, etc. No OCC member should need to suck up to the Board to do this. If you want someone present when documents are handled, to assure that nothing is taken or damaged, that is fine.

It is apparent that the Board is not going to engage in such a project any time soon. It is puzzling why you want to impede anyone else in this regard. Your actions defy common sense. With this sort of mentality at the helm, it ought not surprise anyone that Young Adults choose not to be an active part of OCC.

Again, I searched far and wide for an explanation, or any authority, to justify or explain your actions. The only thing I found was another poor example. The **Redneck Houston Gazette** had another interview with a church leader here in Houston. That situation might be instructive in our present predicament. The interview follows. Please make this letter part of your public agenda at the next business meeting.

Redneck Houston Gazette

Recent Interview With Officer Of Church Board



Crusty Crumble
Hardcore Zenith Church



Rusty Alloy
Redneck Houston Gazette

Rusty: Hi, Crusty. I'm looking forward to this interview.

Crusty: Hi Rusty. Me too.

Rusty: Crusty, ol' boy. I am amazed at your outright censorship of nonexempt documents. How do y'all continue to get by with it?

Crusty: We're subtle with it. That's how. It is entwined and entrenched in our operations.

Rusty: Has anyone done a historical review of Hardcore Zenith Church to see how this has affected your membership and money situation?

Crusty: Naw. We don't need that. Our members are uncritical, naïve, and blindly accept what we tell 'em.

Rusty: What about your demographic void?

Crusty: Huh?

Rusty: I'm asking you about your young adults, ages 19 through about 30 years of age.

Crusty: Awww. Them kids. They don't come here much.

Rusty: Does that bother you, or anyone else?

Crusty: No, not really. I believe that we are all, as a congregation, comfortable with our current percentages of older and younger people.

Rusty: You may be comfortable with your mix of older and younger people. But, do you think this is related to you budget problems.

Crusty: Absolutely not. Our budget problems are caused by people not contributing enough. When folks are tighter than old Dick's hat band, there ain't much you can do about it.



Members of Hardcore Zenith Church are stingy contributors. Overly tight hat bands is the problem. When a hatband is too tight for one's head, it causes the poor chap to be stingy.

Rusty: Do you and your other officers consider yourselves to be functional or dysfunctional?

Crusty: Functional of course. We do a lot of functionalizing. We are very open and fair. We pride ourselves with integrity. We always appreciate an honest appraisal of the situation at Hardcore, especially when it makes us look good. We are always in a compromising pursuit of the truth.

Rusty: I'm sure you are my friend. Thank you so much for our conversation.

* * *

**Redaction of a letter in the form of an email dated
October 13, 2013 from Sara Simons, Chairman of the Board.**

Sara C Simons <sara.c.simons@gmail.com>

Sun, Oct 13, 2013 at 9:49 AM

To: Charlie Dean <charlie.dean81@gmail.com>

Cc: Don Joseph <oakscchouston@aol.com>, Jimmie Saldivar <JSald30280@aol.com>, Don Whitley <doncwhitley@gmail.com>, Bob Simons <bsimons48@gmail.com>, Barb Scantlin <scantbabs@comcast.net>, Katie Spencer <KSpencer@startrustfcu.com>, Dorene Drake <DoreneDrake@msn.com>, Pat Whitley <pkwhitley@hotmail.com>, josephcrew@aol.com, Larry Scruggs <onlytex1@swbell.net>, Pat Scruggs <onlytex@swbell.net>

Hello Charlie,

Thank you for your several communications to the General Board, received over the past couple of weeks. I apologize for not responding sooner to your emails and letters, but will now attempt to address some of your concerns.

Accounting for digital corporate documents. When I heard that you had volunteered to digitalize our archived records, my first thought was "How wonderful!" In the event of a fire or natural weather disaster, the loss of the 75 years of hard copy records would be devastating to the church. However, I have come to understand through various comments you have made in your letters to the Board as well as our discussions during the last board meeting, that you are apparently more concerned with easy and immediate digital access to our more current 2013 records from the Board meetings. Digitalizing our archived records and developing a procedure to facilitate immediate digital access to current records are two vastly different projects. While I personally believe that the more urgent of the two projects is that of digitally archiving our hard copy files, it should be understood that before either project can be undertaken, we need to have a plan, or procedure, or SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for approaching either of the two projects at hand.

First, though, a few words about our current SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) for 1. Filing and storing current and archived records; and 2. Open access to both current and archived records.

1. Our SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for: Filing and storing current and archived records.

a. **Current and active records:** As we discussed during the last General Board Meeting, the official Board Meeting documents consists of hard copies of the various committee and Officer reports, as well as the meeting agenda, sign-in sheet, minutes from the previous board Meeting, and any other documentation submitted during the course of the meeting. These documents are collected during the meeting, and held by the Recording Secretary, in a secure and orderly fashion, until the end of the business year, when they are filed upstairs in our filing cabinets.

b. **Archived records:** At the close of each business year (which, for Oaks, coincides with the calendar year), the outgoing Recording Secretary will take the official current year documents of each of the monthly General Board meetings, the Annual Business meeting, and any Executive Board meetings or Specially Called meetings, and file them, chronologically by month, upstairs in our file room. You stated in one of your letters that "The Church records are a dismal mess." When I last visited the file room, I found the records were actually filed in quite an orderly fashion. Admittedly it has been some months since I've been up there, and in the process of someone accessing the files and re-filing documents, a few documents might have been replaced out of order. This was, in truth, one of the reasons that I was delighted at your offer to digitalize our archived records, as that process would, in itself, necessitate the files being restored to perfect order.

2. Our SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for: Open access to both current and archived records.

a. **Open access to current records:** As stated above, the Recording Secretary maintains all current official documents from the General Board meetings, Executive Board meetings and the Annual Business meeting. I do want to make one clarification here. When we are discussing our records, please note that the "official" documents are those that are submitted to the Recording Secretary and entered into the minutes during the meetings. At one point you mentioned that some documents were on people's personal computers, and were therefore already digitalized. While that may be true, those copies are not the "official" documents. Our SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for accessing these official documents would be to

simply speak to the Recording Secretary and request a copy. If you just want a copy of an unofficial document for your own personal use, you could go to source, so to speak, and ask the Officer or Committee Chair that originally produced the document, for a copy.

b. Open access to archived records: Our SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for accessing our archived records is even easier. Just visit the Church during office hours, access the records, retrieve the document, and after making a copy, re-file the document. If you are “stair” challenged, I’m sure that the Office Secretary or Senior Minister would be happy to assist you.

Now, to address the two projects I spoke about earlier. Again, I reiterate, that in my opinion the more important of the two would be to digitalize our archived records. As we discussed in the last Board meeting, however, I want a definitive plan drawn up and agreed upon by the board before any digitalizing effort is put in to the project. Here are some of the questions that need to be addressed first:

Where will the documents be kept? What is to be included in each document package? What will the digital format be? What will the naming convention be? What will the actual process be for digitalizing the records? How will they be made both accessible and secure? Who will have the ongoing responsibility for updating and accessing them? What will be done with the hard copy documents?
Here are my suggestions:

1. Where will the documents be kept? The church could purchase a 1T USB External hard drive. During the digitalization process, the hard drive would be kept at the Church for those working on the project to access. The drive would need to be backed up on a regular schedule.
2. What is to be included in each document package? I would suggest a packet containing each document submitted to the Recording Secretary during the meeting, in chronological order by submission. It would be handy to devise a form or “first page” that would list, in order, each document included in the packet.
3. What will the digital format be? I would suggest the packet be put in PDF format. Larry Scruggs has, however, brought up several valid points about digital records. They must be continually reformatted and updated to current digital usage. While we all may be able to access and read PDF formatted documents today, in ten years from now, the PDF format may be totally unreadable by the hardware of 2023. I have a whole drawer full of “important files” recorded, not more than 15 years ago to zip floppy drives, which are of course, totally unreadable by any working hardware I own today.
4. What will the naming convention be? I would suggest the following for file names:
YYYY_MM_DD_Board, YYYY_MM_DD_Exec, and YYYY_MM_DD_Annual
Filed in folders designated by year: YYYY_Board_Meetings, YYYY_Events, YYYY_Auxillary_Orgs, ect.
5. What will the actual process be for digitalizing the records? I would suggest going to file room and getting one month packet of documents, put in them in order by submission (you would have to refer to the minutes for that meeting), fill out and include the inventory list form, and then scan the packet to one PDF document. Rename the document according to the naming conventions and file on the drive according to folder year. Replace the hard copies in the file drawer and move on to the next packet.
6. How will they be made both accessible and secure? I would suggest the external hard drive should be kept in the Office of the Secretary and secured at night in a locked drawer. When the secretary’s machine is backed-up, the hard drive could be connect by USB port and included in the back-up. During office hours, the hard drive could be made available for accessing the archived records.
7. Who will have the ongoing responsibility for updating and accessing them? At this time I do not want to unnecessarily burden the Office Secretary with the added responsibility of updating the files, or releasing them for access. Once the archived files are all digitalized, we can formulate a plan for updating the files with the current records, and deciding who will have the ultimate responsibility for maintaining the drive. Perhaps the responsibility would fall to the current Recording Secretary, or perhaps we would appoint an historical archivist to maintain the drive.
8. What will be done with the hard copy documents? It should be noted here that I do not recommend doing away with our hard copy files. These, as Larry says, will last forever, and are and would continue to be accessible to all.

It is my further recommendation that, at this time, we should table the idea of digitalizing our current and active records and until we have a permanent SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) perfected and in place for our archived records. I foresee the process might fall to the Recording Secretary to create the PDF document, either after each

Board Meeting, or at the end of the year, and then transfer the file or files, according to the naming conventions, to the hard drive for archival purposes.

As we discussed during the last Board Meeting, we do not have the facility or wherewithal to securely store the official documents online for access from the internet. I believe that we are all, as a congregation, comfortable with our current level of access to those documents. You inferred in one of your letters that we might be in violation of a law requiring access to documents, but you did not mention which law, or exactly how we might be out of compliance. It would be helpful if the law could be specified, so that we may take a look at the verbiage concerning congregational access to church documents and plan to bring ourselves into compliance going forward.

We have also discussed the digitalization of our monthly newsletters and online access for the archived newsletters. As you know, the newsletter is currently being delivered via email to those members of the congregation with email accounts. We discussed posting the current newsletter on our church web page, and perhaps linking to our archived newsletters. There was discussion at the last Board meeting about the personal identification information contained in the newsletters, and the privacy concerns of individual's information released in the articles. As you recall, after some discussion, it was decided that before the newsletters were posted to the web page, they would be edited for any personal identification content, and that going forward the newsletter would either be constructed with this in mind, or a special "web content" newsletter would be created with internet publication in mind. Since part of the Church Office Secretary's duties are to publish the monthly newsletter, and you indicated your disinterest in learning anything about the church web page software, that task will continue to be part of the Church Office Secretary's duties.

I am aware that this letter does not address all the issues that you have brought before the General Board. However, it should serve to clarify the decisions that have been made regarding the digitalization of Church records. Again, thank you for your interest in these matters and good faith offer of volunteering to help where needed within our church community. If you would like to sit down with me and discuss some of these issues in greater detail, please let me know.

Yours faithfully in Christ,

Sara C. Simons,

Oaks Christian Church (DOC)